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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002515

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TAGS: PGOV PK PREL PTER
SUBJECT: COALITION SECURITY MEETING: FOCUS ON NEGOTIATIONS

ISLAMABAD 00002515 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: PM Gilani chaired a seven hour meeting of coalition partners on July 23 to discuss the security situation. It produced a predictable statement affirming the GOP's three-pronged strategy of political engagement, economic development and force when needed. The public accent was on negotiations and building popular consensus through parliamentary debate for what the government is now terming a fight against "insurgents" and "anti-state" elements. NSA Durrani told Ambassador this was a deliberate strategy to shift the public relations campaign away from the unpopular "GWOT" theme. Disappointingly, there appeared to be no agreement reached on the need for more vigorous military action against extremists. Minister of Interior Malik felt the meeting accomplished little. PM Gilani did succeed in ensuring that coalition partners can no longer claim they were not consulted on GOP security policy. End Summary.

Coalition Partners Meet

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12. (U) Members of Pakistan's ruling coalition met July 23 for what PM Gilani termed a "one point agenda" -- to debate the GOP policy on combating terrorism. Attending the meeting were PM Gilani, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chair Asif Zardari, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) representative Shahbaz Sharif (Nawaz Sharif declined to attend, citing his need to remain in London where his wife is recuperating from surgery), Awami National Party (ANP) leader Asfandyar Wali Khan, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) leader Fazlur Rehman, NSA to the PM Mahmoud Durrani, Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Information Minister Sherry Rehman, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Governor Ghani, NWFP Chief Minister Hoti and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) parliamentary leader Munir Orakzai. The press reported that Chief of Army Staff General Kayani and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) attended the meeting, which lasted for seven hours.

13. (U) Following the meeting, the GOP issued a statement saying there had been "a clear consensus" of the group. Pakistan's national security and internal stability "is paramount, and no one will be allowed to challenge the writ of the state." The main thrust of the coalition's policy to counter extremism will be "political engagement." The statement noted that "Pakistan's territory will not be used for terrorist attacks, nor will attacks from external forces on Pakistan's sovereign soil be tolerated." The group called

for debate in parliament to mobilize public support to build a greater national consensus on Pakistan's battle against extremism and militancy. They also stressed the need for greater cooperation between national and provincial governments and improved civilian law enforcement. To make residents of this area into "stakeholders," the group called for increased investments in education, employment, development and infrastructure.

¶4. (C) Interior Minister Malik told Ambassador July 23 that the meeting had accomplished little. NSA Durrani gave the meeting a more positive spin in talks with Ambassador July ¶24. He said that the meeting began with briefings by the Director General of Military Operations MG Pasha and was followed by a two hour plus security briefing by the NWFP Home Secretary. During the debate that followed, Wali Khan was forceful in saying that Pakistan could not permit cross border operations into Pakistan. Fazlur Rehman blamed the U.S. for all the "evil" in the region and suggested that there would be no problems with extremism if U.S. forces left Afghanistan. Shahbaz Sharif was relatively quiet, said Durrani, but "surprisingly firm" against terrorism. Durrani said the PM deliberately did not use the word "terrorism," as the new strategy is to portray this battle as a fight by Pakistan against "insurgents" and "anti-state" elements. This would sell better with the Pakistan public than the "GWOT" theme, argued Durrani.

¶5. (C) After the meeting, Wali Khan told the press the serious issues for the ANP were peace, and militant sanctuaries in tribal areas. "As long as the sanctuaries remain, peace will be difficult to return," said ANP provincial leader Khattak. Fazlur Rehman told the press that negotiations, not force, should be used to solve the security

ISLAMABAD 00002515 002.2 OF 002

problem in the tribal areas.

¶6. (C) Comment: PLM-N and JUI-F had been complaining that they had not been consulted on the government's policy; this meeting should end that complaint. ANP provincial leaders have been out of sync with the national government on both policy statements and operations; the group at least acknowledged there should be better national-provincial cooperation. Parliamentary debates on the security situation are long overdue. The decision to move the PR focus from the global war on terror to Pakistan's battle with insurgents and anti-state elements is one that could increase popular support for efforts to combat extremism. Without an agreement on the use of force, however, it remains difficult to see how the GOP is going to make real progress in curbing militancy.

PATTERSON